



City of Seattle Seattle Planning Commission

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November 21, 2006

Honorable Councilmember Peter Steinbrueck
Chair, Urban Development and Planning Committee
Seattle City Council - Seattle City Hall
PO Box 34025
Seattle, WA 98124-4025

Re: Commercial Code Proposed Regulations for Ground-Floor Residential Uses

Dear Councilmember Steinbrueck,

The Seattle Planning Commission (SPC) has presented you with comments regarding the proposed changes to the Commercial Code as outlined in Council Bills CB 115745 and CB 115746. This letter details the Commission's more specific comments on the regulations for ground-floor residential use.

We are particularly concerned with the proposed regulations regarding multiple residential entries, and privacy of the residential units on the ground floor. A group of Planning Commissioners recently met with DPD and Council Central staff to address this issue and work out a proposed solution for your consideration, as described below.

Multiple Residential Entries:

The Planning Commission suggests that the requirement for a visually prominent residential entry on each street frontage be changed so that multiple entries would not be required for an apartment building.

Privacy of Ground-Floor Residential Units

The proposed legislation requires that ground-floor residential units address the privacy of their residents by either setting the floor level four feet above the sidewalk level, or by setting the units back from the sidewalk a minimum of ten feet. These requirements are in line with recommendations made by the Commission last year, but the Commission believed them to be too prescriptive.

We propose that a more performance-oriented, less prescriptive approach be taken. The design of ground-floor residential units should address the privacy of those units, either by raising the floor level, by setting back from the sidewalk, by some combination of these, or by other means, all subject to the approval of the Design Review Board. This will provide the flexibility necessary to deal with site-specific conditions, in particular site topography.

In connection with this, we propose that the additional height granted for raising the ground floor level need be only the amount by which the ground floor level is actually raised above sidewalk level, rather than an absolute four feet.

With respect to the additional height for raising the ground floor level above sidewalk level, there is agreement that the requirement for a grade-separated entry, as shown in Exhibit 23.47.012A of the proposed legislation, should be deleted so that the regulations will be in line with accessibility laws and regulations.

The Commission remains committed to assisting you in this matter and appreciates the opportunity to work with you to address our concerns. Please feel free to contact the Commission for clarification on any of these points through our Executive Director, Barbara Wilson at (206) 684-0431.

Sincerely,



Jerry Finrow, Chair
Seattle Planning Commission

CC:

Greg Nickels, Mayor
Seattle City Council
Tim Ceis, Deputy Mayor
Grace Crunican, Susan Sanchez, SDOT
Diane Sugimura, John Rahaim, John Skelton, Lish Whitson, DPD
Rebecca Herzfeld, Keitel Freeman, Council Central Staff

Record of Disclosure

Commissioner Tom Eanes disclosed that he is employed by Hewitt Architects and that they could potentially develop in a commercially zoned area in the future.

Commissioner Chris Fiori disclosed that he is employed by Heartland LLC, and that they could potentially develop in a commercially zoned area in the future.

Commissioner Kay Knapton disclosed that she is a consultant to neighborhood business districts.

Commissioner Tony To disclosed that he is employed by Homesight, a non profit housing developer, and that they could potentially develop in a commercially zoned area in the future. He noted that Homesight has no current development projects underway in a Neighborhood Commercial zone.